

grandmother, and devoted wife. She and John would have celebrated their 65th wedding anniversary this summer. Barbara's influence lives on through the lives she touched, especially those she protected. It's my honor to be one of the many people who will keep her legacy alive by defending our most vulnerable, the unborn, as she did for so many years.

God bless Barbara Willke, and may she rest in peace.

CLIMATE CHANGE THREATENS COLORADO RIVER

(Mr. GRIJALVA asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. GRIJALVA. Mr. Speaker, I rise today as a member of the Safe Climate Caucus. Earlier this week, American Rivers published its annual list of the country's most-threatened rivers. Primarily because of over allocation, the Colorado River is at the top of that list. That is a challenging place to be.

Across our region, 34 million people rely on the Colorado River for drinking water. That includes cities like Las Vegas, Los Angeles, and Phoenix. The Colorado River snakes through the Grand Canyon and is truly the lifeblood of Arizona, and that's why I continue to advocate for Federal solutions to threats from uranium mining and other sources of contamination.

But the real and most serious threat to the health of the Colorado River is climate change, and that should not be ignored. Scientists predict that climate change will reduce the Colorado River's flow by up to 30 percent by 2050, threatening all those communities and resources, including recreation and agriculture.

We need proactive solutions. We need strategies to manage and mitigate climate change and the impacts of climate change. The majority has to deal with this question. It cannot be ignored. The Safe Climate Caucus is challenging the majority to floor debate on climate change. We look forward to that opportunity; and for the sake of the Colorado River, that debate needs to happen.

EXPLOSION IN WEST, TEXAS

(Mr. POE of Texas asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. POE of Texas. Mr. Speaker, it was around 8 p.m. last night, as the sun was setting, when in the historically Czech community of West, Texas, families were finishing up supper and winding down the day. Suddenly the tiny town of 2,600 was shaken by a massive explosion at the nearby fertilizer plant, equivalent to 2.3 on the Richter scale. The fiery blast was so strong that it was described by West Mayor Tommy Muska "like a nuclear bomb going off."

My daughter and her family were in church in Mexia, Texas, about 50 miles away, when they felt the shock. In fact, three firefighters from Mexia took off then and were headed straight for the town of West. Homes were set ablaze and flattened to the Earth. The senior citizens home has disappeared. Many citizens in the town were trapped in their homes. Others were stranded on the streets, covered with blood and no place to go.

When disaster struck, first responders, firefighters, EMS volunteers, and citizens traveled from all over Texas, headed to the town of West. For those of us in Texas, this is not a surprise. Texans always take care of Texans. In fact, so many firefighters came to West that officials said there were too many, and no more assistance was needed.

Mr. Speaker, hundreds of people are injured. Up to 70 are feared dead. Many are unaccounted for as the police go door to door looking for survivors. So as the misty rain settles on the town of West, our prayers go out to the people of this wonderful community.

And that's just the way it is.

NATIONAL DAY OF SILENCE

(Mr. FARR asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. FARR. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in honor of the National Day of Silence. Tomorrow is the 16th year we've commemorated the National Day of Silence, a time when students across the country remain silent for the whole day to draw attention to the discrimination toward their LGBT peers. The National Day of Silence is important for many reasons—to let our youth know they're not alone, that there are plenty of people ready to support them just the way they are.

As my constituent, Heidi Dimas, a senior at Pajaro Valley High School puts it:

The National Day of Silence is important to me because it is a day when you see all the support for the silent ones and that nobody is alone in anything.

I'm proud of my constituents who are calling for a stop to harassment of LGBT individuals. I am particularly proud of my constituents in Watsonville and from the Pajaro Valley High School for hosting the 16th Annual Queer Youth Leadership Awards.

Though many LGBT advocates and their allies are silent tomorrow, we in Congress must never be silent. It is our job to speak for those who cannot speak for themselves. Another of my constituents, Molly Schrank, from Alternative Family Education in Santa Cruz said it best:

The National Day of Silence is important to me because sometimes silence speaks louder than words.

□ 1340

DISABLED VETERANS RED TAPE REDUCTION ACT

(Mr. SEAN PATRICK MALONEY of New York asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. SEAN PATRICK MALONEY of New York. Mr. Speaker, no one should fight for their country, only to return home and have to fight their government. But that's exactly what's happening with over a million disabled veterans today who are waiting far too long to have their claims processed by the VA.

There are, right now, thousands of folks in my home State of New York and in the Hudson Valley who are waiting, on average, over 400 days to have their claims processed. That's a year and a half. That's wrong, and we can do better by our veterans.

I met one veteran recently named Edward Kackos. Ed served his country in Vietnam. He came home. He filed a disability claim just in February 2011. But that was 800 days ago, and Ed's still waiting for an answer. He said to me recently, "Sean, I just need an answer so I can decide whether I'm going to have to sell my house, because I don't want to have it foreclosed."

Think about how disgraceful that is. We need to give him an answer sooner, and there's a solution.

I recently introduced the Disabled Veterans Red Tape Reduction Act. This is a simple idea that would allow veterans to go to doctors outside the VA system to get their claims processed, and it would speed it up.

But this program is at risk right now, a program that 20 percent of all veterans use, because the last Congress failed to reauthorize it.

I urge my colleagues to support this measure for another 5 years.

LET'S HELP SMALL BUSINESSES

(Mr. JOHNSON of Georgia asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. JOHNSON of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, today I have introduced two bills to help small businesses. We all like to talk about how small businesses are the engine of our economy, and that's because that is true. That's why I have introduced the Help Entrepreneurs Create American Jobs Act, which is a bipartisan bill, to double the deduction for startup expenses to encourage entrepreneurs to start a business and create jobs.

I'll also introduce the Fairness and Transparency in Contracting Act to ensure that only small businesses, actual small businesses, receive Federal small business contracts.

Mr. Speaker, these bills are the least that we can do to give our economy a shot in the arm.